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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/11 and Security Council resolution 2145 (2014), by which I was requested to report every three months on developments in Afghanistan.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report was issued on 7 March 2014 (A/68/789-S/2014/163). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

3. The presidential and provincial council elections dominated the political, security and economic environment of Afghanistan during the reporting period. A stable presidential succession will represent the first democratic transition of executive authority in the nation's history. The contest has so far been hard-fought but respectful of the legal framework and mandated authorities of electoral institutions. The enthusiasm with which voters participated in the first round of polling on 5 April was widely seen as a demonstration of support for the democratic process, even as risks and challenges remain. The second round of polling took place on 14 June, after the end of the reporting period, and its final results are scheduled to be announced on 22 July. The President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, has publicly stated that the inauguration date foreseen for his successor is 2 August.

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4. Announcements during the period under review have provided greater clarity on the timeline of the ongoing international military drawdown, with the United States of America seeking to conclude its military presence by the end of 2016. All such planning, however, remains contingent on the establishment of the necessary legal frameworks with the next Afghan administration.

5. Both my Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and my Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator visited Afghanistan during the reporting period, the latter amid landslides and flooding, which were another stark reminder of the country's chronic vulnerabilities.

A. Political

6. The sixteenth legislative term of the National Assembly was inaugurated on 15 March. In addressing the Assembly at its opening session for the last time, President Karzai emphasized that government authorities and security institutions would do everything possible to ensure that the upcoming presidential and provincial council elections would be credible and free of official interference. The President was adamant that the formal commencement of a peace process was a precondition to signing a bilateral security agreement between Afghanistan and the United States, and called on political leaders to preserve national unity, freedom of expression and women's rights. One of the first acts of the lower house of the National Assembly (Wolesi Jirga) was to confirm President Karzai's appointment of the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Younus Qanooni, to the post of First Vice-President following the death, on 9 March, of Marshal Mohammad Qasim Fahim.

7. Technical preparations for the elections were completed on schedule. On 28 March, the Independent Election Commission's voter registration top-up exercise was concluded, with 3,746,755 new voter cards issued, of which 35 per cent to women. An attack by insurgents on the Commission's Kabul headquarters on 29 March interrupted work only briefly, as the most sensitive materials had already been distributed to the provinces. The campaign period in February and March was marked by large-scale rallies and, for the first time, a series of television debates between presidential candidates. These debates, together with local mobilization efforts around the provincial council polls, were seen to have contributed to civic awareness and voter turnout. All the campaign teams addressed women's issues as part of their platforms; three of the teams included female vice-presidential candidates on the ticket. During the final days of the campaign, 3 of the 11 presidential candidates withdrew: Abdul Qayum Karzai, Abdul Rahim Wardak and Sardar Mohammad Nader Naim. In the course of an assessment of the eligibility of provincial council candidates, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission disqualified a further 114 candidates, mainly for not meeting age and education criteria. After resignations and withdrawals, the final number of aspirants in the provincial council elections was 2,591, of whom 296 were women.

8. Afghan security institutions oversaw the planning and implementation of election security, with the Ministry of the Interior in the lead. Two major operations, involving over 35,000 personnel, were conducted in the south and south-east of Afghanistan at the beginning of March as a prelude to the countrywide security

operation for the first round of voting. In order to better secure women's participation, the Ministry of the Interior trained 581 women police officers and 2,245 civilians and recruited 13,690 "female searchers" (women who search women voters) for polling day. In March and April, the Taliban issued a number of statements declaring its intent to violently disrupt the electoral process and threatening participants. Complex attacks on the Kabul and Laghman provincial offices of the Independent Election Commission, on 23 and 26 March respectively, were followed by the assault on the Commission's headquarters. The Kabul provincial office attack killed three civilians and injured four more, including election workers and a provincial council candidate.

9. On 5 April, voting took place in 6,082 polling centres (the total number of polling stations was 19,784). The Commission reported that 15 per cent of the 7,173 polling centres that had been planned originally were closed owing to security concerns or logistical issues, including 341 that were unable to open on election day. There were 7,018,849 votes recorded on election day, of which 36 per cent in women's polling stations. The most pressing technical issue on election day proved to be ballot allocation. The higher-than-expected turnout in some areas, mainly urban centres, highlighted the difficulties in accurately predicting population movements in the absence of polling centre-specific voter lists. Contingency ballots, pre-positioned by the Commission as a precautionary measure, were released in all 34 provinces. Overall, the Afghan public and media reacted positively to the performance of the national security forces, which was widely praised by Afghan and international partners.

10. On 26 April, the Commission released the preliminary results of the presidential elections, the final outcome being subject to the resolution of objections raised during a so-called "complaints period". The Complaints Commission's adjudication process included the holding of five open sessions in the presence of the media and the submission of its decisions on 14 May. The Commission released the final results, based on 6,604,546 votes assessed as valid, on 15 May. The final results changed little from the preliminary outcomes: Abdullah Abdullah (45 per cent); Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (31.6 per cent); Zalmai Rassul (11.4 per cent); Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf (7.3 per cent); Qutbudin Hilal (2.8 per cent); Agha Sherzai (1.6 per cent); Daud Sultanzoy (0.5 per cent); and Hedayat Amin Arsala (0.2 per cent). With no candidate gaining more than 50 per cent of the vote, a second round of polling between the two front-runners is required under the Constitution. On the same day, the Commission published the electoral timetable for the run-off.

11. On 15 May, Mr. Abdullah and Mr. Ghani held separate press conferences announcing their respective intention to contest the run-off poll and thanking the citizens of Afghanistan for participating. Both candidates demanded technical improvements by the electoral management bodies prior to the second round. Political realignment continued throughout the period, with, for example, former candidates Mr. Rassul and Mr. Sherzai, as well as Mr. Sayyaf's running mate, Mohammad Ismail Khan, publicly backing Mr. Abdullah. Mr. Ghani received the support of Mr. Sultanzoy and of Mr. Rassul's first vice-presidential nominee, Ahmad Zia Massoud.

12. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's armed opposition group, Hezb-e Islami, announced on 10 May that it would boycott the second round of voting given both front-runners' commitment to signing a bilateral security agreement with the United States. The

Hezb-e Islami leadership, however, stated that the group would not target the electoral process or citizens who participated in voting. The Taliban continued to publicly condemn the elections: in a statement dated 2 June, it again threatened electoral workers and polling sites and warned citizens to avoid polling locations.

13. On 20 May, preliminary results for the 458 seats on the 34 provincial councils were released by the Commission. A total of 588 polling stations had been disqualified. Of the preliminary winners, 97 were women (legislation requires that 20 per cent of provincial council seats throughout the country be held by women). The Complaints Commission held open hearings between 31 May and 5 June. Owing to the large volume of complaints — 1,283 relating to the election and 1,635 to the preliminary results — the announcement of final results, originally scheduled for 7 June, was delayed.

14. The transparency of elections was enhanced by the presence of observers and party and candidate agents. Observation efforts largely depended on 67 national organizations, which sent 14,585 observers across the country for the first round. In addition, 362,780 party and candidate agents were registered, for the first round, of whom 23 per cent were women. International observers, while modest in number, supported the process with technical assistance and expertise.

15. Within its mandated support role, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) maintained close contact with candidates, campaign teams and the electoral institutions. Throughout the electoral process, and notably amid a rise in rhetoric prior to the release of the preliminary tally and final results, my Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš, urged all parties to act responsibly and respect the two mandated electoral bodies, which should, in turn, cooperate closely in ensuring transparent decision-making and a timely, credible process. Through the second phase of the electoral support project entitled "Enhancing legal and electoral capacity for tomorrow" (ELECT II), the United Nations continued to provide technical and financial assistance to the electoral bodies.

16. Preparations for a second round of voting remained on track, although, with the launch of the campaign period on 22 May, the two candidates' rhetoric was noticeably sharper than during the first round. UNAMA continued to encourage a respectful campaign in the interests of national unity. The Commission's distribution of ballot papers and sensitive material to the provinces was completed by 25 May and district-level delivery commenced on 2 June. A "lessons learned" exercise based on experience gained during the first round sought to ensure improvements in the administration of the process, as did the blacklisting of some 5,000 (of 100,000) electoral workers for suspicion of engagement in irregularities. On 4 June, following the conduct of security risk assessments by the Ministry of the Interior, the Commission announced that it planned to open 6,272 polling centres with a total of 22,879 polling stations. Security planning for the second round included a one-day meeting, hosted by the Minister of the Interior, of all provincial police chiefs in Kabul on 21 May and six regional security briefs for senior security and electoral personnel and provincial governors from 3 to 7 June. On 6 June, two suicide bombers attacked the convoy of Mr. Abdullah in the west of Kabul. The presidential candidate was unharmed, although 13 civilians were killed and 43 were injured in the blasts, which took place on a busy road in the capital.

17. UNAMA continued to promote local dialogue and peace initiatives that were focused, during the reporting period, on managing tensions and on potential fault lines around the elections. Ten initiatives have been launched in 2014 covering 12 provinces. They have included forums to promote dialogue among diverse local political stakeholders from Farah, Herat, Kandahar, Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Nuristan and Paktya provinces. The role of ulema in supporting the peaceful conduct of elections through gatherings of clerics from Balkh, Kapisa and Samangan provinces was also recognized. Separately, between 12 and 15 May, at the request of the parties, UNAMA hosted a traditional assembly of elders in Jalalabad to seek an end to a century-old conflict between two tribes in the remote neighbouring province of Nuristan. More than 70 representatives agreed to stop planting landmines and explosives, to rebuild homes destroyed in the conflict and to establish a mechanism by which to resolve land and property disputes. UNAMA also continued to provide assistance for the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, a civil society initiative that facilitated the finalization, in April, of 30 provincial "road maps" for peace. On 10 June, a report summarizing the main findings of the second phase of the initiative was launched. Proposed conflict-mitigation measures included tackling corruption, which is widespread, including through reform and oversight of local institutions, disempowering and disarming militias, promoting human rights, equitable development and access to services, and making the peace process more inclusive.

18. There were no significant developments with regard to the peace process during the reporting period. A former Taliban-era official, Agha Jan Mutasim, who had sought to launch an "intra-Afghan dialogue" in the United Arab Emirates, was said by Afghan authorities on 14 April to be missing. He subsequently arrived in Kabul and indicated that he would soon seek to restart his efforts. Shifts within the Taliban movement during the period appear to have resulted in more hard-line elements coming to the fore, including through the replacement of the head of the Taliban's Military Commission. In a statement dated 26 April, the Taliban confirmed the move while denying speculation that it was related to dissatisfaction at the failure to disrupt the first round of polling to a meaningful extent. On 31 May, it was announced that a United States soldier in Taliban captivity had been released in exchange for five senior Taliban detainees. In a statement, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, hailed the exchange as having the potential to "open the door for broader discussions among Afghans about the future of their country by building confidence". On 1 June, a statement purportedly from the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Mohammad Omar, welcomed the transfer of the detainees to Qatar. On 2 June, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan published a statement expressing dissatisfaction with the manner of the release. Separately, the joint secretariat of the High Peace Council reported that as at 25 May 8,551 individuals in 33 provinces had joined the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme, which is aimed at drawing lower-level fighters off the battlefield.

B. Security

19. Between 1 March and 31 May, the United Nations recorded 5,864 security-related incidents relevant to the work, mobility and safety of civilian actors in Afghanistan, particularly those events that affect the delivery of mandated activities and programmes. That represented an increase of 22 per cent over the same period

in 2013, an increase of 45 per cent over 2012 and a decrease of 6 per cent over 2011, the most violent year since the fall of the Taliban regime. Of the total number of incidents, 23 involved United Nations personnel, mostly national staff, 11 were incidents of intimidation and 1 consisted of an abduction. The high number of security incidents is mainly attributed to the electoral period, given clearance operations by Afghan security forces and attempts by the Taliban to disrupt the electoral process. On 5 April, polling day, the United Nations recorded 476 security incidents nationwide, of which at least 271 were directly related to polling, compared with 488 recorded on the day of the 2010 parliamentary elections and 310 on the day of the 2009 presidential elections. The east was the site of 30 per cent of the incidents on 5 April while the south reported unprecedentedly low levels of violence. Tactics differed from previous elections, as there were fewer incidents of indirect fire and no successful suicide attacks.

20. Armed clashes accounted for 45 per cent of security incidents between 1 March and 31 May and improvised explosive devices for 29 per cent. In seeking to exert influence through fear and intimidation, targeted killings continued at a high level. Between 1 March and 31 May, 229 assassinations and failed assassination attempts were recorded, which represents an increase of 32 per cent over the same period in 2013. There was also a major spike in suicide attacks in the run-up to the first day of polling, with 12 incidents, including five in Kabul, recorded between 20 March and 3 April. In total, there were 32 suicide attacks between 1 March and 31 May — up from 25 in the same period in 2013. High-profile incidents in the period included a complex assault on a luxury hotel where families were celebrating Nawruz (the Afghan New Year) on 20 March, in which 10 civilians died, and the attack on the Indian consulate in the western city of Herat in the early hours of 24 May, where the rapid actions of security personnel helped prevent fatalities. The targeted killing of foreigners, by a variety of perpetrators, was a prominent feature of the period. On 11 March, a Swedish journalist was shot dead in the diplomatic area of the capital by parties unknown; on 4 April in Khost, a police officer shot two journalists, one of whom, a German photographer, fatally; and, on 24 April, three foreign citizens were killed when a police officer opened fire at a hospital in the capital.

21. Incidents in the south, south-east and east of the country accounted for 3,917 of the total number of incidents during the period. Particularly notable has been the increase in incidents in the east, where several Al-Qaida affiliates, including Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, regularly carry out attacks on Afghan security forces in parallel to the efforts of the Taliban and armed wings of Hezb-e Islami. On 8 May, the Taliban announced in a statement that its 2014 spring operation, "Khaibar", would target senior government officials, members of parliament, security officials, attorneys and judges that prosecute "mujahideen", as well as "gatherings of foreign invading forces, their diplomatic centres and convoys". The announced launch date, 12 May, saw a complex assault on the Department of Justice in Jalalabad in which eight civilians were killed. On 20 May, in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan, around 300 insurgents captured the Yamgan district administrative centre. The Government regained control of the centre on 23 May. The attack was perceived to have been a show of strength at the start of the fighting season, with local power struggles over access to resources fuelling a complex, fluid conflict.

22. As at 11 May, the Afghan National Army numbered 185,131 personnel, including 7,013 members of the air force, against a ceiling of 187,000. Overall attrition rates are understood to have decreased somewhat, while re-enlistment rates remain low. With only 1,138 female personnel, the Ministry of Defence continued its efforts to recruit women, including through television advertisements. The challenges encountered included a lack of female recruiters and facilities for women, a risk of abuse and cultural or family prohibitions. The capabilities and confidence of the armed forces to plan and conduct operations have increased, but issues remain regarding coordination with other agencies and medical evacuation and airlift capabilities. With respect to policing, the United Nations-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan supported 145,939 police personnel and 5,600 Central Prison Department guards as at the end of May. Women accounted for 1,741 police officers and 273 guards. The police academy's training school for countering improvised explosive devices and disposing of explosive ordnances, which opened in January, had trained 100 people and established 88 teams countrywide by the end of May.

23. Separately, the security initiative of the Afghan Local Police continued to expand in the south-east and north-east of the country. As at 29 May, 26,698 personnel of an authorized total of 30,000 were present in 149 districts in 29 provinces; the balance of 3,302 personnel were either preparing for or in training. UNAMA continued to document allegations of human rights violations and impunity involving the Afghan Local Police, particularly in Kunduz Province. In other locations, the police performed to the satisfaction of the local population, including by providing security for election day.

24. On 27 May, President Obama set forth plans for future United States troop levels in Afghanistan, which currently stand at around 32,000, down from a peak of 100,000. At the beginning of 2015, there should be approximately 9,800 troops, to be reduced by half during the year and to be consolidated at Bagram military base, outside Kabul. By the end of 2016, a normal embassy presence with a security assistance component is planned. President Karzai released a statement the following day welcoming the decision, while a number of members of the National Assembly and civil society expressed concern about the readiness of Afghan security forces and the impact on the broader international commitment to Afghanistan. The Taliban, in a statement dated 30 May, dismissed the move as an "extension of occupation until 2016". On 4 June, a meeting of defence ministers at the headquarters of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reviewed the progress made by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the mandate of which will end on 31 December 2014. A follow-up training, advice and assistance mission is planned, although it has been emphasized that international military commitments remain contingent on reaching agreement on the necessary legal frameworks.

C. Regional cooperation

25. During the reporting period, Afghanistan continued to actively engage with its neighbours and promote regional cooperation. China, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan were among the countries in the region to welcome the conduct of the first round of polling and to recognize the importance of a smooth political transition in Afghanistan for regional stability.

26. On 26 March, the President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon, met with President Karzai in Kabul, where several agreements on cooperation were concluded, including between the ministries of the interior. On 27 March, on the sidelines of the regional Nawruz festivities hosted by President Karzai, the presidents of Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and Tajikistan held a quadrilateral summit. In a joint statement, they reiterated the importance of constructive regional cooperation. This included support for ongoing Afghan-led regional efforts within the framework of the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan, as well as infrastructure projects to strengthen regional connectivity. The same day, the World Bank Group approved $526.5 million in grants and credit financing for the Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project (CASA-1000). This will put in place, in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, the infrastructure and the commercial and institutional arrangements required for a sustainable electricity trade.

27. On 19 May, the Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, General Raheel Sharif, visited Kabul to attend the thirty-seventh trilateral security meeting between the heads of the Afghan and Pakistani armies and NATO. In the period that followed, Afghanistan and Pakistan exchanged mutual allegations of cross-border incursions. On 28 May, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan summoned the Ambassador of Pakistan to express strong objections to shelling in Kunar and Nuristan provinces and to the construction of military installations on what it claims is Afghan territory. On 31 May and 4 June, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan stated that insurgent groups based in Afghanistan had mounted attacks on checkpoints it claims were within Pakistan, and that three of its soldiers had been killed in the incidents. The Afghan authorities, in turn, stated that the Pakistani response to the incident of 31 May had included helicopter strikes inside Afghanistan that had resulted in civilian casualties. In protest, Afghanistan boycotted a regional security summit scheduled to take place in Islamabad on 4 June.

28. On the sidelines of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia, President Karzai met with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, on 19 May. President Jinping hailed the smooth conduct of the first round of elections and, in looking to increase stability and economic self-reliance in the future, encouraged international investment in Afghanistan. President Karzai highlighted the common threat posed by terrorism and fundamentalism. In my meeting with President Karzai in Shanghai, I welcomed the continued progress in the electoral process and extended condolences on the recent flooding and landslides. On 26 May, President Karzai attended the swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi of the new Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, and had a bilateral meeting, during which development and the threat of terrorism were discussed. On 30 and 31 May, the new Foreign Secretary of India, Sujatha Singh, visited Kabul and Herat, meeting with President Karzai and the two presidential candidates. Ms. Singh reiterated her Government's resolve to reopen its consulate in Herat following the attack of 24 May.

29. During the reporting period, activities and technical meetings took place with a view to making progress on three of the confidence-building measures identified in the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan: a counter-improvised explosive device workshop, held in Kabul on

8 and 9 March, under the counter-terrorism confidence-building measure; an international conference on sharing experiences and developing a regional picture on hazards and risks for joint action plans, held in Islamabad on 12 and 13 May, under the disaster management confidence-building measure, followed by a regional technical group meeting; and a regional technical group meeting on trade, commerce and investment opportunities, held in New Delhi on 15 May, under the trade facilitation confidence-building measure, at which an action plan for 2014-2015 was developed. Preparations continued for the fourth Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference, to be held in China in August 2014.

30. The International Contact Group on Afghanistan and Pakistan held a meeting in Tokyo on 15 May. Discussions focused on the status of the 2014 elections, arrangements for the upcoming Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework ministerial review meeting, to be held in London in late 2014, and continuing international support for Afghan security forces.

III. Human rights

31. As at 31 May, UNAMA had documented 1,143 civilians killed and 2,214 injured by armed conflict in Afghanistan in 2014. This represents an increase in civilian casualties of 11 per cent compared with the same period in 2013. UNAMA attributed 78 per cent of those casualties to anti-government elements and 8 per cent to pro-government forces. Another 8 per cent of the casualties were due to unattributed crossfire during ground engagements between the parties to the conflict and 6 per cent were undetermined, resulting mostly from explosive remnants of war. Among the casualties were 79 civilian deaths and 219 civilian injuries caused by anti-government elements targeting election workers, polling centres, voters, electoral convoys and compounds between 1 January and 31 May. UNAMA also documented 122 instances of anti-government elements carrying out serious acts of intimidation against civilians, including threats of death or of cutting off fingers (inked as proof of voting) — although to date there is no evidence that these were carried through. On 5 April, UNAMA documented 33 civilian deaths and 126 injuries, mostly from attacks by anti-government elements at or near polling sites.

32. Improvised explosive devices remained the main cause of civilian casualties. They accounted for 32 per cent of the total and resulted in 331 civilians killed and 734 injured between 1 January and 31 May, an increase of 3 per cent over 2013. Of those casualties, 50 per cent occurred in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar. Remote-controlled devices accounted for 38 per cent of civilian casualties from improvised explosive devices, down 10 per cent from 2013. The proportion of civilian casualties from pressure-plate (or victim-operated) improvised explosive devices, however, increased by 44 per cent compared with the same period in 2013. The casualties included 12 civilians who were killed, in Ghazni Province on 31 May, while travelling to a wedding party in two minivans that hit such devices planted in the road; most of the fatalities were women and children. For the first time, the number of civilian casualties caused by ground engagements was almost on par with the number of civilian casualties caused by improvised explosive devices: 310 civilians were killed and 752 were injured between 1 January and 31 May, an increase of 39 per cent in casualties caused by ground engagements compared with the same period in 2013. UNAMA also documented an increase of

20 per cent in female civilian casualties, with 102 women killed and 189 injured in the first five months of the year.

33. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on Children and Armed Conflict continued to receive reports of incidents of grave violations of children's rights. Between 1 February and 30 April, 123 children were killed and a further 301 were injured by armed conflict in Afghanistan; 88 of the incidents occurred in the southern region. Improvised explosive devices were the leading cause of child casualties, responsible for 42 deaths and 82 injuries. Unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines claimed the lives of a further 27 children and injured another 46. Other grave violations of children's rights recorded included: 11 attacks against locations providing health-care services, 83 incidents of attacks against schools and education personnel, 6 incidents of underage recruitment by anti-government elements and Afghan local police, 2 incidents of sexual abuse within the Afghan security forces, 3 incidents of abduction by anti-government elements and 17 incidents of denial of humanitarian access by the Afghan Local Police and the Taliban and other anti-government elements.

34. On 24 April, the Government of Afghanistan submitted to the United Nations its third report on the implementation of the children and armed conflict action plan. The report highlighted progress in 2013 to prevent underage recruitment and included annexes reporting on killing, maiming and sexual violence against children. Activities included a number of training workshops and seminars and the identification and removal of 16 underage persons from service in provincial police headquarters in 2013. In seeking to no longer have Afghanistan included in my annual report on children and armed conflict, a road map to enhance implementation of the action plan has been developed through consultation between the Government and the United Nations, but awaits final endorsement. On 12 May, after several round-table discussions with Islamic scholars and legal experts, UNAMA launched a booklet entitled "Protecting Afghanistan's children in armed conflict", which focuses on six grave violations of child rights. Designed as an advocacy tool, the booklet is based on national and international law and on fundamental tenets of Islam.

35. The new Criminal Procedure Code was published on 5 May and came into effect on 5 June. On 17 May, the Wolesi Jirga ratified the President's legislative decree, whereby article 26 of the Code was amended to reinstate previous legal provisions enabling women to continue to testify against relatives, thereby facilitating the prosecution of suspects in cases of domestic violence. Other provisions in the new Code, including the mandatory presence of a defence lawyer during investigations and proceedings in felony cases and the right to challenge the extension of pretrial detention before a court, strengthen legal protections for detainees. Despite improvements, concerns remain that permitting persons to be detained for up to 18 days before being brought before a judge is a contravention of international obligations. UNAMA and other United Nations entities continued to support efforts to distribute the new Code to justice institutions throughout the country.

36. UNAMA continued to visit Afghan-run detention facilities to observe the treatment of persons detained for their involvement in conflict. During the reporting period, UNAMA visited 20 places of detention, in 10 provinces, run by the National Directorate of Security, the Afghan National Police, the Central Prisons Directorate and the Afghan National Army.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul process and coordination of development assistance

37. In ensuring continued progress against the benchmarks established in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework in a period dominated by electoral competition and awaiting political transition, the Government and international donors focused on technical deliverables. On 10 May, the Minister of Finance hosted a gathering of members of parliament and representatives of the international community, relevant ministries, civil society and the private sector to highlight progress made by the Government on its Framework commitments. Achievements set forth by the Minister included: promoting implementation of the law on the elimination of violence against women with the release by the Ministry of Women's Affairs of its baseline report on 8 March; the Wolesi Jirga's endorsement of the laws on minerals and value-added tax on 3 May; and the introduction to the National Assembly of the laws relating to anti-money-laundering and combating the financing of terrorism on 24 May and the law on tax administration on 29 May. The law on value-added tax was later passed by the upper house (Meshrano Jirga) on 3 June. Discussion on the laws on minerals and money-laundering is expected to continue, however, with a number of concerns still to be addressed in ensuring compliance by Afghanistan with international obligations.

38. The economic situation of Afghanistan remains of concern. Economic outlooks released in April by both the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank indicated declining growth, largely because of consumer and investor uncertainty, which is due to the political and security transitions and is further compounded by rising security expenditure and declining revenue. The World Bank projected that the economy would grow by 3.2 per cent in 2014, against an estimated growth of 3.6 per cent in 2013 and of 14.4 per cent in 2012. Lower-than-expected government revenue collection is seen to be the result of weak enforcement by tax and customs administrations. A report by the International Monetary Fund released on 16 May reached the same conclusions and highlighted the Treasury's tight cash situation. The need for the Government to reduce expenditure, increase revenue collection, strengthen tax and customs enforcement and enact a sound financial regulatory framework was emphasized. The impact of such reduced economic activity and revenue has meant that government commitments to development activities at a provincial level are currently suspended.

39. On 6 May, the Government endorsed in principle the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for 2015-2019, which, it recognized, was aligned with government programmes and development plans. A stronger focus on infrastructure and job creation was requested, and it is understood that the incoming administration may revisit the document. The Framework supports key areas of the Afghan development agenda focused on the licit economy, basic services, social equity, the rule of law and governance.

V. Humanitarian assistance

40. A series of emergencies in northern Afghanistan, the result of heavy seasonal rains and above-average snow-melt, again highlighted the chronic vulnerabilities to natural disasters of what remains one of the world's poorest countries. On 2 May,

significant landslides in Badakhshan Province killed an unconfirmed number of people. Altogether, the floods and landslides that occurred in 132 districts throughout May were estimated to have affected 150,000 people and damaged and destroyed 16,471 homes. On 6 June, more large flash floods hit Baghlan and initial reports indicate a significant loss of life and the destruction of hundreds of homes. The provinces of Jawzjan, Saripul, Faryab, Balkh and Baghlan were the most severely affected. Contingency planning meant that provisions were pre-positioned based on the flooding patterns of 2013, which had affected 204,000 people and damaged and destroyed 22,000 homes. Relief stocks proved sufficient, with the major constraints being physical access where infrastructure was damaged and security challenges in contested areas.

41. On 5 and 6 May, my Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs visited Kabul and Badakhshan Province. She called for continuing support to vulnerable communities affected by conflict and natural disasters and warned that any significant reduction in aid during the transition period could be devastating. As at 31 May, overall humanitarian funding received in Afghanistan, including by the Red Cross and Red Crescent family of organizations, reached $244 million for 2014. Humanitarian funding aligned with the United Nations strategic response plan stood at 40 per cent of the appeal requirement. The first standard allocation of $20 million of the newly established common humanitarian fund was finalized in May with priority interventions aimed at providing up to 800,000 Afghans with access to essential health services and at addressing the needs of up to 400,000 severely malnourished children, mainly in southern and south-eastern Afghanistan.

42. On 26 March, the Internally Displaced Persons Task Force, co-chaired by the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and the United Nations, approved a road map for the implementation of the national policy on internally displaced persons. Between 1 February and 30 April, the Task Force recorded 6,779 displacements owing to conflict, most of which in Faryab, Balkh, Farah, Ghor, Kabul, Nangarhar, Kapisa and Badghis provinces. This brings the national total to some 660,000 persons internally displaced owing to conflict. On 30 April, a portfolio of projects proposed under the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries was launched in Pakistan by the Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Ranging from emergency assistance to long-term development interventions, the projects aim to foster the sustainable return and reintegration of refugees to Afghanistan. The project to renew proof-of-registration cards, which was launched in February, will continue until 30 December 2015. Around 75 per cent of the 1.6 million refugees registered in Pakistan completed the process by the end of May. Between 1 February and 30 April, 3,535 refugees voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan with the assistance of the United Nations, of whom 2,061 were from Pakistan, 1,429 were from the Islamic Republic of Iran and 45 were from India. This represented a decrease of 64 per cent compared with the same period in 2013.

43. Humanitarian access constraints continue to be recorded under the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' global monitoring framework. Key areas of concern remain attacks against personnel, assets and facilities and the violation of health facilities. As at 30 April, 82 incidents of violence against personnel, assets and facilities were recorded in 2014, resulting in 22 deaths, 11 injuries, 83 abductions and attempted abductions, and the arrest and detention of five aid workers. Between

1 January and 30 April, 36 incidents affected health facilities and assets, the majority in the eastern and central provinces. Prior to the first round of elections, intense advocacy by the humanitarian community emphasized the obligation to not target civilians and civilian facilities, including health clinics and schools designated for use as polling centres. On election day, 2 of 173 health clinics and 45 of the 3,546 educational facilities designated as polling locations were affected by election-related violence. This represents a two-thirds reduction in the number of incidents compared with 2009.

44. As at 31 May, Afghanistan reported four cases of polio, all in the east of the country, reinforcing the importance of cross-border cooperation and coordination in combating the virus, including in terms of synchronizing polio vaccination campaigns with Pakistan. In general, personnel working on polio programmes have continued to have access to insecure areas, but the uncertainty of the electoral period has had an adverse impact on campaigns in some locations.

45. During the reporting period, 10 battlefields and 144 minefields were cleared by the mine action sector, supported by the United Nations, and an additional six districts were declared mine-free. In March and April, a total of 57 casualties related to mines and unexploded ordinance were recorded; 16 of these were in or around international military firing ranges or former bases. The United Nations continued to work with ISAF to help ensure that premises being closed or transferred are cleared of unexploded ordnance. To date, 81 km^2 of firing range have been cleared and 33,000 explosive items and almost 13,000 items of small arms ammunition have been destroyed. March marked the end of the first year of the 10-year workplan to remove all hazards from Afghanistan by 2023; during that first year, 87.2 km^2 of land were cleared. It is estimated that 4,081 minefields and 218 battlefields, affecting 1,609 communities in 33 provinces, remain to be cleared.

VI. Counter-narcotics

46. Between 1 March and 31 May, the Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan conducted 678 operations that resulted in 583 arrests, the dismantling of 6 illicit heroin laboratories and the seizure of 22,646 kg of precursor chemicals, 7,911 kg of opium, 4,840 kg of cannabis, 423 kg of heroin and 1.2 kg of methamphetamines. Four police officers were killed and seven wounded in the line of duty. Efforts to prevent trafficking through Kabul International Airport are being strengthened through mentorship and training activities supported by the United Nations. As a result, 17 kg of heroin were intercepted there between 1 March and 31 May. Similar efforts will be required in Herat, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif international airports.

47. As at 27 May, 1,473 ha of land under opium poppy cultivation had been eradicated in 13 provinces, according to data verified by the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics together with the United Nations. Helmand Province accounted for 901 ha of such land, with figures in other provinces being: 22 ha in Uruzgan; 94 ha in Kandahar; 75 ha in Kunar; 43 ha in Nangarhar; 40 ha in Badakhshan; 36 ha in Balkh; 24 ha in Kapisa; 12 ha in Zabul; 10 ha in Faryab; 9 ha in Kunduz; 6 ha in Daikundai; and 1 ha in Laghman. These efforts resulted in 13 deaths (eight police, three army and two farmers). The area eradicated was significantly smaller than the 4,724 ha cleared in the same period in 2013. On 27 May, representatives of four ministries and the Chair of the Afghan Red Crescent Society appeared before the

Meshrano Jirga to address senators' rising concerns at the low level of eradication this season. It was stated that efforts had been very limited owing to the demands on Afghan security forces around the elections.

48. On 18 March, the third steering committee meeting of the regional programme for Afghanistan and countries in the region was held in Vienna on the margins of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The eight countries concerned (Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) attended, as well as donors. The progress made during 2013 in the four subprogrammes (regional cooperation in law enforcement, criminal justice, demand reduction and research advocacy) was noted. At the same time, ministerial review meetings for the Afghanistan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Initiative and the Triangular Initiative, involving Afghanistan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan, were also held to further strengthen on-the-ground collaboration throughout the region. The meeting on the Triangular Initiative concluded with the signing of a formal joint ministerial statement focused on enhancing cooperation in the areas of drugs control and border management. On 29 May, the fourth Afghanistan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Initiative meeting of senior officials was held in Dushanbe; the ministerial meeting was held on the following day. A declaration on counter-narcotics cooperation was adopted following discussions emphasizing better cooperation between law enforcement and judicial bodies.

VII. Mission support

49. UNAMA undertook a series of operational and contingency-planning exercises prior to the elections to review the broader business continuity, crisis management and security plans in accordance with the Organization's overall guidance. UNAMA also provided support to ELECT II by contracting two helicopters to provide logistical support throughout the electoral period. The roll-out of Umoja, the "go live" date for which was 1 March, was successfully managed. Training and capacity-building activities for staff using the system continued in close consultation with the Kuwait Joint Support Office.

50. With the support of the Office of the United Nations Controller in New York, UNAMA will prepare an interim budget for the first half of 2015, based on existing resource levels, to allow enough time for a revised budget for 2015 to be finalized by the end of 2014. Overall, as at 31 May, UNAMA had 1,496 personnel (and a 7 per cent vacancy rate), comprising 340 international and 1,156 national staff. In addition, there were 60 United Nations Volunteers, 15 military advisers and 2 police advisers.

VIII. Observations

51. The present report is issued amid landmark elections in Afghanistan. To date, the political engagement demonstrated by the candidates and the electorate, together with the efforts of electoral and security bodies, has been impressive, reinforcing national and international confidence in the future of Afghanistan. A political transition resulting from an outcome accepted by the candidates and the electorate would provide a solid mandate for a new leadership to tackle the country's many

political, economic and security challenges. I congratulate the people, electoral bodies and security institutions on progress to date. The process — full of challenges — is by no means over and, as long as risks remain, the United Nations shall be actively seized of the matter. In my recent meeting with President Karzai, I welcomed his continued support for a smooth and timely transition.

52. The first round of voting on 5 April saw enthusiastic popular participation by both men and women across the country despite the poor weather conditions and the threats of violence. It stands as a testament to the determination of Afghans to exercise their right to vote and shape their country's future. In what has been a truly Afghan-led, Afghan-managed process, technical planning and preparations were better than in previous elections. This is not to say that they were perfect. The electoral institutions — the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission — were established, for the first time under agreed legislation, and are new and still maturing. The two presidential candidates rightly demanded improvements before the second round. While there was progress, flaws undoubtedly remained. We must however be clear on the necessary outcome: a credible process and result that is accepted by the candidates and the Afghan people. We should also not forget the provincial council elections, which are an important element of ensuring local representation and accountability.

53. My Special Representative for Afghanistan continues to meet with all stakeholders in support of the inclusiveness and integrity of the process. Electoral management bodies have been urged to ensure transparency in their decision-making and conduct so as to reassure the Afghan people that their valid votes will count. Accountability, together with clear and timely communication with the public, observers and the campaigns, remains vital throughout the process, including the tallying and adjudication of the results in this decisive election. The two presidential candidates, both well-known and respected national figures, also bear heavy responsibilities. They must disavow fraud by their supporters and respect the authorities of the electoral management bodies. Once electoral complaints have been adjudicated in accordance with the law, I urge the candidates and their supporters to accept the outcome. At this critical juncture for Afghanistan, the need is for statesmanship, not gamesmanship. In the post-election period, whoever the winner is, the need is for an inclusive administration drawing on the country's many diverse elements to best ensure national unity and stability.

54. Little progress has been possible in this time of uncertainty in establishing formal dialogue between the Government and the main armed opposition groups. It is clear that there are splits within the Taliban movement, with some of the more hard-line elements continuing to hold the grave misperception that there can be victory on the battlefield. Efforts to achieve peace have, nonetheless, continued at the community level, where complex and often long-standing cycles of violence require multi-tiered approaches. Left to fester, local grievances and disputes — including over access to resources — can further provide insurgents with opportunities to make gains. I welcome United Nations-supported community efforts to resolve the long-running conflict in Nuristan. I hope that the agreement will provide the foundations for a more peaceful future for these communities and set a wider example in Afghanistan. I also welcome the launch of the most recent report on the Afghan People's Dialogue for Peace, a civil society initiative that is an inspiring example of inclusive, rights-based peacebuilding by ordinary Afghan men and women. The elections were a further demonstration of the Afghan people's commitment to the

political process and a rejection of continued conflict and violence. On the campaign trail, candidates made pledges to work for peace, and I urge the new leader to seek to build and strengthen Afghan-led, Afghan-owned channels of dialogue. The United Nations is ready to provide support.

55. In the meantime, civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, as they are increasingly caught in the crossfire between Afghan forces and anti-government elements, with women and children taking a particularly heavy toll. The Taliban's stated aim of targeting the elections — a civilian process — was of grave concern. Overall, the vast majority of civilian casualties continued to be at the hands of anti-government elements. I am particularly concerned at the rise in victim-activated improvised explosive devices. Ending the use of these indiscriminate weapons has been the subject of ongoing advocacy by the United Nations in Afghanistan, and last year's decrease was widely welcomed. Civilian targets and indiscriminate tactics breach the norms of war and the fundamental tenets of Islam and undermine the claims to legitimacy that such groups make. I underline again the obligations of the parties to distinguish between civilians and combatants.

56. Among the priorities facing the country's new leader will be a decision on legal frameworks for the United States and NATO troops' presence after 2014. Both presidential candidates have stated their intention to sign such frameworks to allow the smooth planning and implementation of the follow-on training and assistance mission in support of Afghan institutions. In planning and implementing operations around elections, Afghan security forces have been courageous and increasingly confident, including in terms of placing an emphasis on protecting women so that they too can participate. These efforts have helped bolster institutional morale and popular confidence in the capabilities of national security institutions, which have held their ground amid the international military drawdown.

57. To Member States, I emphasize that even as the physical presence of their troops decreases, obligations to provide security and development assistance must be met in ways that are predictable and reinforce Afghan systems. There must not be a perception that the Afghan people are being abandoned. The very heart of the transition is the principle of Afghan leadership with international support through the decade of transformation. Mutual commitments made at the NATO Chicago summit and at the Tokyo conference must be kept. The NATO summit in September and the London ministerial-level development conference planned for November provide important opportunities to reiterate and reinforce mutual commitments with the new Government of Afghanistan.

58. Continuity of support must not, however, mean business as usual. The economic situation of Afghanistan is of grave concern and requires the urgent attention of the new administration. There must be real commitment to economic reform, the rule of law and good governance — including combating corruption — together with accelerated progress on a rights-based agenda, notably sustaining and strengthening women's rights. Hard decisions and rapid, robust action is required to increase government revenue and ensure jobs-based growth. This includes expediting an agreement on a sound regulatory framework that encourages investor confidence and is compliant with international obligations. Increasing outreach and consultation with the private sector and civil society is required to help ensure inclusive growth. Growing dependence on the illicit economy is a threat to the economic and institutional stability not just of Afghanistan but of the wider region, fuelling

corruption and funding for terrorists. Addressing the threat posed by narcotics requires genuine commitment to tackling entrenched interests and the lack of tangible results to date is of great concern.

59. Economically, the interconnections between Afghanistan and other countries in the region will grow and should contribute to progress on shared interests and wider stability. The CASA-1000 electricity project is an example of the potential and possibilities in regional energy connectivity and trade through Afghanistan. I welcome the World Bank's approval of funding and encourage other countries and institutions to step in to help address the funding gap. Progress in the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan, seen in a number of the confidence-building measures during the reporting period, will however require active and constructive engagement in ensuring continued momentum before and after the ministerial conference to be held in China in August.

60. Humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are likely to rise given chronic poverty and continuing insecurity. A particular focus is required on emergency health needs, including trauma care and childhood malnutrition. Afghanistan remains prone to recurrent sudden and slow-onset natural disasters. The northern provinces in particular have been the subject of recurring relief interventions over recent years, with flooding once again this spring having a devastating impact on vulnerable populations, infrastructure and livelihoods. As this relief effort switches to rehabilitation and reconstruction, there is an important opportunity to afford greater priority to disaster risk management and risk reduction. This includes greater surveillance of risk and the related issues of land allocation and restitution. The Government's recently endorsed policy on internally displaced persons provides useful practical guidance and tools to support a more calibrated approach to disaster risk management.

61. I would like to express my gratitude to all national and international staff members of UNAMA and to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, for their continued dedication, often under challenging conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.